

Greg Snider
Or Gallery
Vancouver
January 4 to 15

Greg Snider's recent sculpture amusingly examines our conceptions of representation, specifically with reference to site and memory traced in the sculptural fabrication. Snider titles his work, or more accurately refers to the work as, *A Representation of the Great Lakes in inch and a half Galvanized Steel Arranged in a Space Like This*. In itself, the title, although seemingly precise, cannot duplicate the experience of the work. Rather than define perception the title — enlarged as a text and painted on the windows of the gallery by a professional sign painter — is an adjunct to the physical object. Here the sign functions, not as a caption, but as advertising with a dangling referent. Like what? The text invites comparison.

The sculpture consists of a cutout of each of the Great Lakes in inch and a half galvanized steel manufactured commercially from enlarged map tracings. These are arranged in a three-dimensional configuration relative to their actual positions. The work makes a number of turns and twists between representation and abstraction. Unlocated, these pieces have an engaging formal relationship as abstracted shapes, but as representative objects they signify ontological procedures welded in their own fabrication.

The work makes several references to Minimalist concerns, but with inversions. Like the Minimalists, Snider has his pieces commercially fabricated using readily available industrial, rather than older traditional, art materials. He ignores Judd's reductive conclusions, and chooses those directions which are more concerned with the ability of abstracted shapes to express or represent another condition. One cannot know in advance how the shapes in Snider's work will interact. In this sense Snider appears closer to Anthony Caro or Tony Smith.

Snider, however, is less interested in either their monumental scales or their heroic aspirations. Rather than composing an environment in which to contain the spectator, Snider's pieces form a central object easily negotiated by a viewer. But the work nonetheless alludes to monumentalism. Heroic proportions collapse into an illusory quality: the piece is approximately one and a half meters high but weighs nearly a ton. In the representation Snider extends Minimalist strategies more literally. The residual processes of manufacture and industry forged in the sculpture mimic the technologies of steel production and subsequent fabrication taking place on the site the sculpture represents.

What the Great Lakes symbolize depends on social expectations traced by numerous associations or memories. Snider tells me the work has many autobiographical references. He has lived in and around various locations on the Great Lakes,

Wisconsin. He says that the galvanized steel surface reminds him of the way the lakes look in winter from an airplane. But not everyone makes similar associations. Perhaps to a Westerner these are just places on a map and their representation only symbolizes industrial power structures from which they are coldly removed. Snider refuses to make statements within the work about their significance; instead, he refers to their existential qualities.

Sculpture as arrested artifact of the process of labour is the theme of another of Snider's more recent work, *Work Table with Work* (1983) shown in the Simon Fraser Gallery. Here Snider uses the shovels that mix the cement pedestal, as supporting struts when the mixing process solidifies; he turns the mass upside down, and places on it a transformed shovel spade resembling a primitive mask. Traces of the labour are the basis for the sculptural process; and traces of the labourer arrest in the persona of the tool as the cultural artifact.

In the more recent works Snider returns to his earlier investigations of, as Ron Glown's writing in *Vanguard* put it, "severe and overt physicality within the forces of tension, stress, compression and gravity in poised equilibrium." Now there is less interest in the psychological narrative of say *Projections* (1982). In the representation of the Great Lakes stress is again placed on the arrangements of elements: three of the larger lakes are propped up against one another interlocked only by gravitational and weight equivalences.

Snider weighs the castings of the synthesis of process and place with considerable introspection. Lake Erie, for example, lies inert flat on the floor. In this work installation details are tight: the colour of the text painted on the window matches the colour of the paint on the floor equating their function as respective grounds.

Ultimately the meaning of the work posits itself in the significance of the extrapolation from the site. The witticism of the text re-appears as object: a representation is not so straightforward. When evanescent qualities such as place and memory coalesce as thing, the result is never without paradox. Thus, the purpose of the sign (the representation) is confounded by this ambiguity. The sculpture indicates the site of labour in existential terms: only in the process of manufacture does it have clear significance. This is either the work's strength, or its weakness: the object of labour is both absurd, and yet meaningful.

Ellen Ramsey

From: VANGUARD

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Greg Snider, *A Representation of the Great Lakes in inch and a half Galvanized Steel Arranged in a Space Like This* (1984), inch and a half galvanized steel, courtesy: the artist

photo Jim Guffman